



Aging Planning Bulletin for Aging Leadership Planning Teams Number 3

The North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program

Background

As the population ages and life expectancy increases, more and more North Carolinians face the challenge of providing care to a loved one who needs help because of chronic illness or disability. Family caregivers provide an estimated 80 percent of all long-term services and supports to chronically ill, frail, and disabled adults across NC, making them central to a comprehensive long-term care system. To assist these caregivers, the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) and the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) administer the North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) through Title III, Part E of the Older Americans Act.

The goal of the FCSP is for the state and local aging network to leverage and transform an assortment of supportive services for caregivers into a seamless system that meets their diverse needs including information, counseling, training, respite, and other forms of relief and assistance that enable them to continue their efforts. The FCSP is led by DAAS and the AAAs, each of which has a Family Caregiver Support Specialist. These Specialists work to leverage resources, develop partnerships with community resources, identify and support critical needs, expand successful services, and evaluate the program to guide its future direction.

Urgency: (High)

Although the ultimate goal of the FCSP is to provide services and supports for family caregivers, it cannot be accomplished through the FCSP alone. With limited funds and increasing numbers of caregivers, greater community collaboration and ownership in providing a system of support are essential. Possible collaborators must include service organizations, faith-based groups, employers, government, and many others. As the Resource Guide for the National Family Caregiver Support Program states, “a responsive support system for caregivers should be less about individual assistance through direct services and more about information brokerage and enhancing service through community engagement.”

Relevance:

For Consumers (High)

- Caregivers often experience severe stress leading to mental and physical health concerns making caregiving difficult, if not impossible.
- Caregiving can be financially costly due to medical expenses and loss of employment, health insurance, and retirement income.

For County Government (High)

- A recently released national report estimates that North Carolina has over 840,000 family caregivers providing 900 million hours of such care at an economic value of \$8.9 billion annually.
- Without the work of caregivers, it is possible that many more individuals would require facility placement that would dramatically increase the county Medicaid budget. In fact, one study (1998) stated that as little as a one-month delay in nursing home placement for persons with Alzheimer's Disease would save the nation's Medicare and Medicaid programs an estimated \$1.12 billion annually.
- Almost two-thirds of caregivers work full or part-time. Without community and business support, many caregivers are forced to quit their jobs threatening the workforce stability and their own economic future.

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For Service Providers (High)

- Provision of services is more efficient and effective when the role of family caregivers is well understood and supported.

Questions:

For Local Planning Team:

- Counties, through the FCSP and other community-based services, should have a range of supports available to caregivers including information and access to services; training on self-care, coping, and basic personal care skills; counseling; and respite. Does your county provide a range of services to caregivers?
- Is work currently underway to identify and leverage community resources (faith-based groups, advocacy groups, employers, etc.) who are willing to expand needed supports for caregivers beyond what is possible with public funds?
- Are caregivers involved in the work of the local aging leadership planning team?
- Are local service providers involved in efforts to increase your community's awareness of caregiving issues and services available to caregivers?
- Are key local agencies partnering to support family caregivers (e.g., Cooperative Extension, Vocational Rehabilitation, mental health, social services, senior centers, etc.)?
- Did your community have at least one event for this past year's *Candlelight Reflections* to honor family caregivers?

Best Practices

The Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services (DSS) Adult Services Section has been heavily involved in the Family Caregiver Support Program and also in a special Alzheimer's Disease Demonstration Grant since the implementation of both programs in North Carolina. With the leadership of the DSS Family Caregiver Support Specialist, numerous community agencies have worked together to educate, support, and celebrate family caregiving. A caregiver support workgroup is a part of the county's Status of Seniors Planning Initiative, whose mission is to "engage the community in creating a dynamic plan that enhances the quality of life for older adults by focusing resources on their needs."

Caregiver training and education have become central tools in many communities. Many AAAs are involved in these activities. For example, the Cape Fear Council of Governments AAA has teamed up with the Lower Cape Fear Hospice & LifeCareCenter, the Eastern NC Alzheimer's Association, and others to present caregiver workshops on Alzheimer's Disease, the AARP Powerful Tools for Caregivers, and other topics of interest to caregivers and their families. These are often held at senior centers and local churches assuring additional community engagement and awareness.

Contact and Resource Information:

Local: Your local Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Specialist

State: Chris Urso at 919-733-8400; chris.urso@ncmail.net

<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/aging/fcaregr/fchome.htm>